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Panel urges U.S. limits in Nicaragua

Attacks Reagan policy in Central America

By ALFONSO CHARDY
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A House subcommittee recommended Tuesday tight limits on U.S. activities in Central America, including an end to covert support for rebels fighting Nicaragua's leftist government.

The House Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee also voted that Congress restrict the Reagan Administration's actions in war-torn El Salvador. The subcommittee recommended that Congress:

- Kill $50 million of Reagan's requested $110-million package of additional military aid for that country this year.
- Slash 1984-85 military aid from $86.3 million to $50 million.
- Formally limit the number of U.S. military advisers to 55.
- Change U.S. policy to seek a political solution to the conflict.

Other setbacks to administration policy from the subcommittee included a recommended cut in 1984 military aid to Honduras from $41 million to $21 million, and an outright prohibition on all American military assistance and sales to Guatemala with a ban on stationing of American military advisers there.

The voice votes in the House panel, which now go to the full House Foreign Affairs Committee, came a few hours after Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey and other high-level CIA officials assured the Senate Intelligence Committee that the administration is complying with the letter and spirit of a congressional ban on CIA activities to promote the overthrow of Nicaragua's Sandinista government through U.S. support of guerrillas.

After the closed Intelligence Committee briefing, Chairman Sen. Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.) issued a statement that he is "convinced that no activities are being undertaken by the U.S. government for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua."

In separate interviews later, however, committee vice chairman Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D., N.Y.) and a panel member, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.) questioned Goldwater's assessment.

"That is not the last word," Moynihan said.

"Questions still remain about the administration's role in Central America and I expect the Intelligence Committee to reconvene next week to continue analyzing this question."

A growing dispute over the administration's policy on Nicaragua centers on the Boland Amendment, named for Rep. Edward Boland (D., Mass.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. The amendment prohibits the CIA or the Pentagon from financing military activity designed to overthrow the Nicaraguan government or provoke a war between Nicaragua and neighboring Honduras, the main staging base of the anti-Sandinista rebels.

Administration officials said Tuesday night that Casey and other administration officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee that the CIA was honoring the Boland restrictions because its only goal in helping the rebels is to "harass the Sandinistas, push them toward negotiation with their armed opposition, and interdict their arms consignments to the Salvadoran guerrillas."

"In my judgment," said Goldwater, "the Senate Intelligence Committee has been kept fully and currently informed of all U.S. government activities involving Nicaragua and the director of the CIA has reconfirmed this to me today and I am satisfied that the agency is not violating the letter or the spirit of the Boland Amendment."

Despite the assurances, the House Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee endorsed legislation from its chairman, Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.), which, if approved without modification by the House and Senate, would supersede the Boland curbs and ban all direct and indirect U.S. assistance for "military or paramilitary operations in or against Nicaragua by any nation, group, organization, movement or individual."

Before Barnes brought the bill up in his subcommittee Tuesday, he added a series of clauses that could still permit the U.S. government to undertake covert actions if the President "determines that such assistance should be furnished in the national security interests of the United States."

At a separate Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on U.S.-Nicaraguan relations, Thomas Enders, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, said that because of the situation in Central America, "it is conceivable that Cuba or the Soviet Union could be tempted to escalate the conflict" by introducing Cuban combat forces or modern high-performance fighter aircraft in Nicaragua.

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